

Testimony of Mayor John Fabrizi, City of Bridgeport, CT
March 13, 2006

Good Afternoon, and welcome to Bridgeport for all of today's attendees to this Public Hearing. I am John Fabrizi, Mayor of the City of Bridgeport.

I am deeply appreciative that Congressman Shays and others recognize the importance of the brownfields issue and have encouraged discussion on the issue by organizing this Public Hearing.

We in Bridgeport have long felt that neither the State of Connecticut nor the federal government dedicates enough resources or attention in any form towards brownfields redevelopment.

Brownfields that are not redeveloped are a contributing factor in many of the major problems that face Connecticut and the entire country today:

- immense pockets of poverty in our urban centers
- highway congestion
- the accelerating pace of natural habitat destruction in our suburbs and rural areas
- and the escalation of property tax burdens in big cities and small towns alike.

If we do not deepen our commitment to "recycling" brownfields, I know that Connecticut will never enjoy all of the economies and benefits of **smart growth**, no matter what investments are made elsewhere or laws are changed. Please know that for Bridgeport specifically, brownfields are the single greatest impediment to meaningful and sustainable improvement of our local economy. This is a part of the lasting legacy of our proud industrial history, a history in which we served America as the "Arsenal of Democracy" through two World Wars, and provided a standard of excellence for the world's machine tool industry.

The impact of brownfields was first identified in Bridgeport approximately 15 years ago. At that time, we saw many industrial properties that had been a source of economic strength for Bridgeport during the 20th century were increasingly being vacated, neglected or abandoned.

While the City suspected for some time that contamination problems could exist on many of these properties, the adoption and enforcement of new environmental laws brought these problems sharply into focus

- new companies were not moving into many of these properties
- banks were not willing to lend money for the purchase or improvement of these properties
- owners were letting the properties deteriorate and fall into tax delinquency.

The City of Bridgeport has pro-actively attacked the brownfields problem since the early 1990s, a cause that I championed as a City Council member and have continued to champion as Mayor.

In the mid 1990s Bridgeport successfully competed to become a US EPA Brownfields Pilot City, only the second in the country to receive that designation. The initial EPA grant allowed us to identify, inventory and prioritize over 250 brownfield parcels in Bridgeport.

Since conducting this inventory, we have had numerous successes in brownfield redevelopment, large and small. We have expanded city parks, recycled industrial properties, created entertainment venues, and modernized large portions of Bridgeport's waterfront.

With local resources, we have leveraged funding from several federal agencies, and several more State agencies. On one particular project, we assembled a total of \$4 Million from eight (8) different sources, including two corporate foundations.

When funding has been hard to come by, we have a track record of creativity and resourcefulness. EPA has repeatedly recognized our need and performance by funding Site Assessment Grants, Cleanup Grants, and our Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund.

Our successes to-date are not enough, however. Brownfields continue to impact our quality of life in neighborhoods, the employment prospects of our residents, and threaten public health in ways that we are only starting to quantify. The financial impact of brownfields is significant. Based on an examination of our current zoning and real estate investment trends, we have estimated that the City forgoes somewhere between \$25 Million and \$50 Million in property tax revenues every year because more than 400 acres of brownfield sites are not realizing their economic potential. With a municipal budget of less than \$450 Million, Bridgeport cannot afford to have its real estate sit so idle and unproductive.

What are the limitations on our progress? Here are some:

- **Staffing;** brownfield projects are labor intensive and time consuming- we are currently contemplating the hiring of a full-time "Brownfields Coordinator"
- **Inadequate funding is available for site assessments and remediation-** the City can only afford to take on a certain amount of this work every year
- **Inadequate funding is available for demolition activities-** often a necessary prerequisite for assessment and remediation.
- **Liability** concerns prevent the City from being more aggressive in obtaining site control.

What would we like to see the federal government do?

- Support Bridgeport's current funding applications to EPA for 2006; **We have proven that we know what to do with the funding when we get it!**
- Increase assessment grant size when the site/project complexity merits it.

- Increase the size of cleanup grants: The present limit of \$200K can address only the smallest cleanups.
- Change laws to authorize cleanup grants for qualified private third parties when endorsed by local government. This will insulate cities/towns from liability, while engaging more parties in cleanups and increasing efficiency.
- Continue to replenish Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan funding for successful communities.
- Compel more private cleanups through “use it or lose it” laws
- Facilitate communications/between congressional staff and City staff directly involved in brownfield activities.

On behalf of the City of Bridgeport, I offer sincere thanks to Congressman Shays and all those that organized today’s hearings.